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HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Sixty-ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)* OF THE 1840th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Monday, 10 July 2000 at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. MEDINA QUIROGA

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document CCPR/C/SR.1840/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS (agenda item 2)

Twelfth meeting of Chairpersons

1. The CHAIRPERSON invited Ms. Evatt to comment on the report on the twelfth meeting of persons chairing human rights treaty bodies.

2. Ms. EVATT said that every year the Committee discussed the report on the chairpersons' meeting, but decisions were rarely taken on it - a situation which should be rectified. The purpose of the chairpersons' meeting, namely to heighten the effectiveness of the human rights treaty body system in specific ways, entailed the identification of common problems and areas where the procedure and practice of those bodies could be harmonized. It would be advisable to examine fields where the mandates of bodies overlapped and to ascertain whether cooperation or coordination was possible in order to avoid duplication of efforts by States and treaty bodies. A further function of the chairpersons' meeting was to liaise with the other human rights mechanisms in the system so that they could benefit from each other's work. In addition, the meeting provided chairpersons with an opportunity to explore, together with other United Nations agencies, possibilities of including the human rights dimension in their activities. The conclusions and proposals emerging from the chairpersons' meeting should always be put on the agenda of the Committee and the latter should try to respond to each of them; otherwise, the meeting would be otiose. It might be helpful if the recommendations made in the report were first forwarded to the working group dealing with procedural improvements so that it could set priorities.

3. In her opinion, priority should be given to the recommendations contained in paragraphs 69, 78, 80 and 82. Paragraph 69 constituted progress towards the harmonization of the practices and procedures of the various Committees. One idea that the Human Rights Committee could promote was the procedure it was developing to deal with States which had not reported for a long time. Turning to paragraph 71, she thought that it might be useful to hear the views of States parties. There could be no follow-up to recommendations, as advocated in paragraph 72, if the Committee did not respond. She considered that chairpersons did not so much require rules of procedure as goals and terms of reference. As far as paragraph 77 was concerned, she felt that technical briefing would be useful and that a practical response to human rights indicators was needed. On the other hand, education was not perhaps a high priority for the Committee. In connection with paragraph 80, she agreed that it would be helpful to receive information about the work of the Special Adviser on Regional Strategies. She foresaw no problems in respect of the recommendation in paragraph 82 and urged the Committee to play a very active role in preparations for the World Conference against Racism.

4. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Committee to comment on paragraphs 70, 72, 79, 83 and 88 before the next meeting of chairpersons. Did the Committee agree with Ms. Evatt's proposal that the report be passed to the working group chaired by Mr. Klein? Should it be discussed immediately or at a later stage?

5. Mr. BHAGWATI said that it might be better to discuss the report after members had had more time to study it.

6. Mr. KLEIN, referring to the Plan of Action for strengthening implementation of three treaties (contained in document HRI/MC/2000/4), said he welcomed the fact that the follow-up to treaty body recommendations was mentioned in the document, because lack of action on the Committee's recommendations constituted one of the worst gaps in the monitoring system. The only coordination of follow-up to treaty body recommendations referred to in paragraphs 34 et seq. and 44 et seq. of the document concerned technical assistance. Had any suggestions been made at the chairpersons' meeting which might offer a common basis for following-up treaty body recommendations? The problems encountered in each field were identical; perhaps some consideration should therefore be given to the establishment of a joint unit in the Office of the High Commissioner which would collect and pass on information to treaty bodies.

7. His second point concerned the strengthening of cooperation between treaty bodies and experimenting with "new methods of work". What was meant by new methods of work? Paragraph 45 of document HRI/MC/2000/4, examined the difficulties caused by overlapping. It was very important to develop a common approach to related treaty provisions, although the different definitions contained in the various instruments made it difficult to arrive at a consistent interpretation. For example, reservations might be made to a provision on a particular topic in one treaty, but not to a similar clause of another treaty; and that situation affected interpretation.

8. The CHAIRPERSON pointed out that paragraph 45 of document HRI/MC/2000/4 was closely related to the recommendation made in paragraph 69 of the report on the chairpersons' meeting. A year earlier it had been suggested that an inter-committee meeting be convened. Financially such a meeting was feasible, but it was necessary to decide what the subject of the meeting should be, otherwise there would be no point in holding it. The Committee should express its opinion on that matter.

9. Mr. ZAKHIA said that the real difficulty lay in the increasing number of reports and communications submitted. It was vital to establish priorities. Reports concerned the whole population of a country, whereas communications affected one or two individuals. The Committee's role should be reconsidered since there was a danger that it would not have time to deal with reports with the requisite thoroughness.

10. Mr. BHAGWATI drew attention to the fact that the Committee did not know whether a country had followed its recommendations until four to five years had elapsed. In order to remedy that situation, a meeting was to be convened in south Asia at the end of September with

human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to investigate ways of training them and showing them how they could help treaty bodies by reporting to them on follow-up. A similar meeting would be organized in south-east Asia and north-east Asia.

11. The CHAIRPERSON said that follow-up had been leitmotiv of the chairpersons' meeting. Help was in fact available from several quarters. For example, officials from the United Nations Development Programme could indicate what recommendations had been implemented and what technical assistance was required by States to that end. Similarly NGOs were very willing to participate in follow-up, but the Committee must react to the information they supplied.

12. She announced that the Committee had received an invitation to a seminar on the right to development which would be held in Geneva at the end of August.

The public part of the meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.